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Court seals secret hearing data on Tafoya

FORT COLLINS — A District Court judge Tuesday sealed the record of a secret hearing that reportedly was called to discuss a possible threat on the life of accused hit man Eugene Aloys Tafoya by ex-CIA agent Edwin P. Wilson.

Judge J. Robert Miller clamped a gag order on attorneys, forbidding them to discuss the hearing, which took place Tuesday immediately after a jury was sworn in to hear the attempted-murder and conspiracy trial of Tafoya, a 47-year-old former Green Beret.

Before Miller's ruling, a source said an informant told authorities that Wilson threatened to kill Tafoya if he testifies in his own defense. The threat allegedly was made in London.

The source said confusion has reigned since authorities first heard of the alleged threat. Reportedly, the informant has changed his story, saying that what he actually learned of was "a new hit list" apparently linked to Wilson. It was not clear whether Tafoya's name was on the list.

Larimer County Sheriff's officials last week issued a cryptically worded news release in which they denied a threat had been made. Defense attorneys also reportedly were told there was no "official threat."

The defense attorneys said they requested Tuesday's hearing because they are confused about the threat denials, while security around Tafoya appears to be excessive. Security around Tafoya remained as heavy as ever Tuesday.

The corridor leading to the courtroom has been virtually sealed off by wire-mesh barriers and guards armed with pump-action shotguns. Gas masks, an M-16 rifle, and — reportedly — a submachine gun, rest nearby. Guards on top of the courthouse scan nearby buildings for signs of trouble, while specially trained Air Force German shepherds sniff for explosives.

Many observers have said the security, which is costing Larimer County thousands of dollars, wouldn't be as extreme without some evidence of a threat against Tafoya.

Tafoya, a resident of Truth or Consequences, N.M., is charged with the shooting of Libyan dissident student Faisal Zagallai on Oct. 14, 1980. Authorities believe they can trace Tafoya's past to Wilson, a former CIA agent, indicted gunrunner, and alleged trainer of Libyan death squads.

Several months before Zagallai was shot, Libyan strongman Moammar Khadafy warned dissident Libyans abroad to return home or be "liquidated." Sever-

al Libyans who ignored the order were killed in Europe in the spring and summer of 1980.

Zagallai's shooting was the first incident in the United States allegedly connected with the warning.

Tafoya has admitted working for Wilson in Libya. However, Tafoya said that work was a cover for his real employment with the CIA.

Tafoya told reporters in September that he went to Zagallai's apartment the night of the shooting to deliver a CIA message. Zagallai took offense, started a struggle, forcing Tafoya to shoot in self-defense, he said.

Defense attorneys have complained bitterly of the tight security surrounding their client. After the jury was picked Tuesday, they asked for a hearing with Miller so they could uncover details of the threat which reportedly caused the tight security.

As reporters were walking into Miller's chambers, the judge asked them to wait outside so he could chat with Larimer County Sheriff Jim Black. Moments later, a court reporter went into chambers and the closed hearing was held.

Miller said a transcript of the hearing will be sealed until the end of the trial. Opening statements are to begin Thursday after the court takes Veterans Day off.